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# The Pueblo Incident

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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## THE "PUEBLO" INCIDENT

Mr. MANSFIELD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that an article by James Reston which appeared in the Great Falls, Mont., Tribune of January 30, 1968, entitled *Pueblo Incident and Vietnam Lesson*, be printed at this point in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

"PUEBLO" INCIDENT AND VIETNAM LESSON  
(By James Reston)

WASHINGTON.—In the Arab-Israeli war and the latest international crisis in North Korea, President Johnson has shown that he has learned something from the tragedy of Vietnam. He has listened carefully to the arguments for and against military intervention in North Korea and restricted himself to cautious defensive measures.

The lesson of Vietnam is that it is easier to get involved in wars than to get out of them. Sudden military action, even if limited to retaliation for some provocation, can quickly lead to counter-measures and soon involve the prestige and power of the nation.

This is what happened when the President reacted to the North Vietnamese attack on our destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin by bombing North Vietnam, and there were officials here who wanted to take similar action to punish the North Koreans for capturing the USS *Pueblo*.

This could, however, have quickly reopened the war along the 38th parallel in Korea, and confronted us with a two-front conflict at a time when we are already over-extended. In fact, this may have been precisely what the Communists wanted. So the President waited, turned to U.N., and called up some air and naval reserves—just enough to fill some of the gaps in the under-strength units weakened by the drain in Vietnam, but not enough to alarm the world.

He could have ordered the bombers off the Enterprise and hit North Korea for its capture of the *Pueblo*. Public opinion would undoubtedly have backed him, for the North Korean provocation, unlike the complicated tangle of Vietnam, is simply a humiliation which everybody understands and resents, but this would not have gotten the 83 crew members back, and might have started a second war, which nobody needs in the present circumstances.

No doubt there are North Korean vessels on the high seas which the U.S. Navy can intercept and hold until this senseless incident is settled. Apparently the Russians have understood the possibility of retaliation for their own spy ships, innocently characterized as trawlers, are reported to have vanished in the last few days from their normal cruising lanes near the coastal United States.

Nevertheless, the *Pueblo* incident, even if it is settled without military action, is instructive. For it shows just how much of our effective military strength is now tied down in Vietnam, and how vulnerable we are under present policies to new diversionary attacks on areas we are committed to defend.

The gap between our commitments and our power to meet those commitments could be very great, very quickly, if the Communists were to stir up trouble through Communist guerrillas in Korea, Taiwan, Laos, Thailand, Iran or the Near East, or in any one of two of these places at the same time.

Even by creating military incidents, the Communists can influence the internal policies of the United States, and divert to war more and more funds which are needed for the reconstruction and civil order of our cities.

President Johnson's problem was to take strong diplomatic action and prudent military defense measures, without being dragged into any impetuous moves which would put intolerable strains on an already over-extended military establishment abroad and financial structure at home.

So far he has kept the balance fairly well on the *Pueblo* affair. But the larger balance between his worldwide commitments and his power is still uneven, or can quickly be made so by even limited moves by Communist forces anywhere in the great arc from the Sea of Japan to the Mediterranean.

Yet in this situation, many in the Congress who oppose the President's supplementary war tax are at the same time the loudest howlers for a harder war in Vietnam and military retaliation in Korea.

Fortunately, the President has not fallen this time for the tactical move of acting first and thinking of the consequences later. He has measured his words and his action in a very difficult situation. He deserves the unity and support on Korea he has requested.